



CENTRE FOR  
JOINT WARFARE  
STUDIES  
(CENJOWS)

# GEO-STRATEGIC SCAN

1 - 1 5 D E C E M B E R 2 0 2 3



**China's  
President Xi  
Visits Vietnam  
Hail Upgrade Of  
Ties; Agree To  
Boost Security  
Efforts Looking  
To Build Up  
More Resilient  
Ties**

*Colombo Security  
Conclave Agrees  
on Roadmap for  
Security in  
Indian Ocean  
Region*

**23 Soldiers Martyred, 27  
Terrorists Killed In DI Khan  
Terrorist Attack: ISPR**

**China Takes  
More Land In  
Bhutan Before  
Expected Border  
Deal**

**Erdogan Expects  
Steps From US On F-  
16 Sale For Sweden  
NATO Accession**

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

## FLASH POINTS/ MAJOR POWERS

<b>Israel-Palestine Conflict</b>	<b>1</b>
<i>Ms Anamitra Banerjee, Research Assistant</i>	
<b>Russia-Ukraine Conflict</b>	<b>6</b>
<i>Gp Capt Amitabh Mathur (Retd), Senior Fellow</i>	

## NEIGHBOURHOOD SPOTLIGHT

<b>China</b>	<b>8</b>
<i>Col Tushar Mittal, Senior Fellow</i>	
<b>Nepal/Myanmar</b>	<b>11</b>
<i>Col VN Shukla, VSM, Senior Fellow</i>	
<b>Pakistan/ Sri Lanka</b>	<b>15</b>
<i>Wg Cdr Vishal Jain, Senior Fellow</i>	
<b>Indian Ocean Region</b>	<b>18</b>
<i>Col Ajay Thakur, VSM, Senior Fellow</i>	

## REGIONAL SPOTLIGHT

<b>Africa</b>	<b>20</b>
<i>Col Jagat Singh, Senior Fellow</i>	
<b>ASEAN</b>	<b>24</b>
<i>Col Sudhir Tokas, Senior Fellow</i>	
<b>Japan</b>	<b>27</b>
<i>Dr Ulupi Borah, Senior Fellow</i>	
<b>Europe</b>	<b>29</b>
<i>Capt (IN) (Dr) Nitin Agarwala, Senior Fellow</i>	
<b>Latin America</b>	<b>31</b>
<i>Ms Aanchal Sinha, Research Intern</i>	
<b>Arctic</b>	<b>33</b>
<i>Ms Diksha Jain, Research Intern</i>	

# When Hamas Is Dismantled, A Second War Looms

<https://www.timesofisrael.com/when-hamas-is-dismantled-a-second-war-looms/>

Hamas on Sunday revived its threat that none of the hostages it is holding will leave Gaza alive unless and until all of its demands are met. Those demands include an end to the war, an Israeli withdrawal from Gaza, and the release of all Palestinian security prisoners, including those captured on and since October 7. Put another way, the price of the hostages' freedom is for Hamas to live to carry out more and worse October 7 massacres — as it has said it fully intends to do — with the additional involvement of all of its currently jailed murderers.

## COMMENTS

Three weeks since the IDF and Hamas reached an interim pause to release hostages and precisely a fortnight since it elapsed, on December 1, shortly after Hamas declared that it was unwilling to observe the pause deal, the fighting resumed in Gaza.[1] The temporary pause provided Palestinians with a small respite, after seven weeks of near-constant Israeli shelling over the Gaza Strip. With scores of armoured vehicles and airstrikes pounding at southern Gaza's major urban centres, Israel is now seeking to take control over areas, where Hamas still governs.

## Operational & Strategic

With the IDF carrying out precision attacks in Khan Younis and neighbouring areas, to track down Sinwar [2] and other top officials, large groups of Hamas fighters are surrendering. This highlights the grave fault lines present within the Hamas leadership that has severely impacted the morale of its fighters on the ground.[3] Following a relatively quick accomplishment in northern Gaza, military operations across the south would likely need at least three weeks to achieve IDF goals and fracture the Hamas backbone.[4] Based on reports, the IDF took advantage of the Gaza conflict to test an AI target-creation tool known as "the Gospel," which facilitates Israel in producing "targets" on an automated basis. [5]

---

[1] Slow, B. O. (2023, December 1). Why has the Gaza ceasefire come to an end? BBC News. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-67589259>

[2] Israel's hunt for the most-wanted person in Gaza. (2023, December 10). Axios. <https://www.axios.com/2023/12/10/israel-hunt-most-wanted-person-in-gaza-hamas-war>

[3] In a statement by the IDF spokesperson- Rear Admiral Daniel Hagari said that upon capturing and interrogating various Hamas commanders, one common factor has been highlighted by all, i.e. Sinwar and other high ranking Hamas leaders are detached from the reality of Gaza.

[4] Israeli tanks reach centre of Khan Younis in new storm of southern Gaza. (2023, December 11). Reuters. <https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/palestinians-report-israeli-battles-khan-younis-after-us-blocks-gaza-ceasefire-2023-12-10/>

[5] Livemint. (2023, December 2). Israel-Hamas war: How AI helps Israel army select bombing targets in Gaza | Mint. Mint. <https://www.livemint.com/ai/israelhamas-war-how-ai-helps-israel-army-select-bombing-targets-in-gaza-11701528705126.html>

## ISRAEL-PALESTINE CONFLICT

The operators employ a "incredibly precise" calculation of the pace of occupants exiting an establishment soon before a strike, based a procedure to determine whether any civilians are alive. This war has also exposed the use of electronic warfare (EW) to attack the Isareli soil and its allies, targeting critical infra as well as basic necessities. Since November 22, cyber attacks by IRGC-affiliated actors, 'CyberAv3ngers' have been on the rise, according to a declaration from the int agencies. [6] Such attacks being the latest addition to the tools of asymmetric warfare has kept the agencies on their toes as they pose a serious threat to national security.

Israel is concentrating its efforts on protecting its northern towns against the vastly more formidable Lebanese Hezbollah. The Burkan missile strikes at the IDF facility near Malikia and Ramya resulted in an immediate kill. Post the temporary pause, Hezbollah has increased its assaults, including the bombing of a naval facility near Ras Al-Naqoura and a strike on the Shomera barracks. [7] To reinstate a buffer zone, Israeli authorities have demanded that Hezbollah's fighters retreat as per the 2006 agreement. Israeli warnings to Hezbollah appear to be aimed at raising the international spotlight on Hezbollah to move away from its borders rather than a genuine determination to establish an additional front amid the conflict.

On the other hand, Houthis too are targeting merchant and naval Ships passing through the Bab-el-Mandeb Strait, heading towards Israel. [8] The region handles a large portion of the global shipping traffic. The Suez Canal solely transports a significant portion of Europe's energy needs and food items like palm oil and maize, accounting for the majority of all the globe's finished goods. [9] In the global oil market, prices are declining and investors are increasingly worried about shortages in key countries. The insurance premiums for vessels traversing the region have increased over the past few days, totaling to several million of dollars for larger vessels such as oil tankers. While naval vessels patrolling the Red Sea have adequate equipment and are capable of retaliation, commercial boats lack similar safeguards.

### Humanitarian Aspects

The current phase of conflict has resulted in fresh Israeli assault on Hamas strongholds in southern Gaza, wherein the majority of the enclave's 2 million residents fled following the initial phase of war and have since relocated in tents, educational institutions, and on the streets. According to UNRWA[10], civilian casualties have increased, and latest warnings to evacuate are spreading fear.

---

[6] Wong, Y. W. (2023, December 2). US, Israel warn of Iranian-Linked cyberattacks on water systems. Bloomberg.com. <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2023-12-02/us-israel-warn-of-iranian-linked-cyberattacks-on-water-systems>

[7] Millender, M. (2023, December 12). IntelBrief: Israel turns attention to Hezbollah amid northern escalation. The Soufan Center. <https://thesoufancenter.org/intelbrief-2023-december-12/>

[8] Jazeera, A. (2023f, December 15). Shipping companies pause Red Sea journeys after Houthi attacks. Al Jazeera. <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/12/15/yemen-rebels-hit-cargo-ship-in-latest-red-sea-attack>

[9] How are Houthi attacks on ships in the Red Sea affecting global trade? (2023, December 15). The Times of Israel. <https://www.timesofisrael.com/how-are-houthi-attacks-on-ships-in-the-red-sea-affecting-global-trade/>

[10] WE MUST PREVENT HUMANITARIAN AID FROM BEING USED AS AN INSTRUMENT OF WAR. (2023, December 9). UNRWA. <https://www.unrwa.org/newsroom/notes/we-must-prevent-humanitarian-aid-being-used-instrument-war>

## ISRAEL-PALESTINE CONFLICT

The failure to extend the temporary pause has restricted the supply of humanitarian aid, water, and medical aid with limited access to sanitation, hygiene standards are terrible, and airborne and water-related diseases are on the rise. This also raises the issue about if Israel's assessments about proportionality have altered throughout the present conflict. The WHO pointed out “nearly difficult catastrophic state of affairs” in Gaza, where medical requirements had risen and the danger of illness had increased while the healthcare system had been severely weakened. Nasser Hospital, Khan Younis' primary hospital, became inundated with dead and injured.[11]



Source: VOA News

America has exerted pressure on Israelis to adjust the character of its present offensive to guarantee that civilian casualties are minimised, facilities are not destroyed, and emergency aid can be delivered. [12] Israelis claims to be tackling the humanitarian crisis by giving recommendations to Gazans, yet there is a sense of rampant uncertainty. Further, the alternatives to gather precise details regarding Israel's mandates for evacuation have been additionally difficult for Gazans who do not have access to phones or social media sites.[13] Additionally the shortage of fuel and electricity makes the situation even more challenging for Gazans. Additionally the shortage of fuel and electricity makes the situation even more challenging for Gazans. The grim situation has heightened worries that the border with Egypt might be overrun, allowing an extensive number of Palestinian refugees to cross into Egypt and perhaps destabilising a US Arab ally. [14] . With the Strip in extreme humanitarian need, Kerem Shalom, recently began screening assistance deliveries destined for the enclave, although the vehicles continued to pass via Rafah for entry. The Knesset's approval [15] paved the way for a fresh path of the "temporary" shipment of assistance into Gaza through its Kerem Shalom border, with weeks of criticism and internal pressure.

---

11] Gaza's "catastrophic" health situation almost impossible to improve, says WHO. (2023, December 10). Reuters. <https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/gaza-health-situation-is-catastrophic-who-chief-2023-12-10/>

[12] Kim, V. (2022, December 13). The U.S. criticizes Israel for 'indiscriminate' bombing in Gaza. The New York Times. <https://www.nytimes.com/2023/12/13/world/middleeast/us-criticizes-israel-for-indiscriminate-bombing-in-gaza.html>

[13] Jones, M. O. (2023, December 4). Fact or fiction? Israeli maps and AI do not save Palestinian lives. Al Jazeera. <https://www.aljazeera.com/opinions/2023/12/4/fact-or-fiction-israeli-maps-and-ai-do-not-save-palestinian-lives>

[14] Hubbard, B. (2023, December 15). Displaced Gazans put pressure on Egypt's border. The New York Times. <https://www.nytimes.com/2023/12/14/world/middleeast/gaza-border-rafah-egypt.html>

[15] Haaretz. (2023, December 8). U.S.: No deadline on IDF to end Gaza war; Israel to open Kerem Shalom crossing. Haaretz.com. <https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/2023-12-07/ty-article-live/under-u-s-pressure-israeli-cabinet-approves-more-fuel-for-gaza/0000018c-4281-db23-ad9f-6ad9e0600000>

## ISRAEL-PALESTINE CONFLICT

The fighting has also taken a toll on Hamas causing it to progressively abandon the Gazans to survive on their own, while Hamas police are still operating in the south. Medical staff and the Gazan health ministry finds itself in a difficult position to handle torrents of injured patients with each passing day. Reports allude to people in Gaza being critical of Hamas and accusing it of stealing the humanitarian aid adding to the misery of the Palestinians. With almost close to 135 hostages still held by Hamas and proxies, Israelis and Americans are demanding the International Committee of the Red Cross to take some action to convince Hamas in allowance of aid and medics for the hostages.

### Global & Regional Response

Though Israel is determined in its efforts to proceed with its Gaza campaign "with or without international support", the diplomatic pressure on Israel keeps growing at the world stage. The UNGA vote on 12th December calling for a ceasefire in Gaza demonstrates the manner in which the global sentiment is evolving amid the civilian casualties spike. The vote totalled to 153 in favour, 10 opposed, and 23 absentees, which is substantially greater compared to the number supporting the Oct. 27 Arab led motion calling for a "ceasefire" resulting in a suspension of hostilities. Eight countries supported America and Israel in rejecting the motion: Austria, Guatemala, Czechia, Micronesia, Liberia, Papua New Guinea, Nauru, and Paraguay. It further demonstrated Israel, completely isolated in the region, considering each of its Arab neighbours unanimously rejecting the American and Austrian amendments to call out Hamas and likewise casting votes in favour of the urgent ceasefire motion.

Considered to be the ninth-largest contributor, the Swiss parliament's lower house has decided to slash \$21 million yearly funds for UNWRA, claiming the organisation promotes aggression towards Israelis. The G7 (the United States, Japan, Canada, the United Kingdom, Germany, France, Italy, and the European Union) promoted "humanitarian pauses & corridors" [16] for delivering aid, has demanded an unrestricted release of hostages, and has denounced the "accelerating increase in extremist settler acts directed at Palestinians [17]" within the West Bank. Though America has made some noises about the imperative for Israelis to preserve civilians, adding to its previous positions while supporting Hamas's exclusion from postwar leadership; these declarations do not alter the United America's military or diplomatic support for Israel while it expands its campaign against Hamas as reflected through its veto in the UNSC. With the recent meeting between Jake Sullivan and PM Netanyahu, [18] America has pressed Israel to provide a detailed timeframe and plan of action on how the low-level stage of the conflict will begin and precisely what will it entail.

---

[16] Street, P. M. O. 1. D. (2023, December 6). G7 Leaders' statement: 6 December 2023. GOV.UK. <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/g7-leaders-statement-6-december-2023>

[17] With all eyes on Gaza, Israel tightens its grip on the West Bank. (2023, November 27). Crisis Group. <https://www.crisisgroup.org/middle-east-north-africa/east-mediterranean-mena/israel-palestine/all-eyes-gaza-israel-tightens-its>

[18] "High intensity" phase of Gaza war needs to end within weeks, Sullivan tells Netanyahu. (2023, December 15). Axios. <https://www.axios.com/2023/12/14/jake-sullivan-netanyahu-israel-meeting>

## ISRAEL-PALESTINE CONFLICT

The UK govt along with America had also designated eight Hamas finance members under sanctions for furthering the group's deadly goal. Among those targeted, three Hamas operatives are Ankara based, depicting Turkey's extensive history of harbouring Hamas officials and aiding such heinous behaviour, despite being a NATO ally. The US' veto of a UNSC resolution for a cease-fire has sparked widespread outrage and despair throughout the Arab world.[19] The push from the Arab world in the recent past has been endorsing a 'Viable two-state solution plan' to rebuild Gaza with a UN roadmap.[20]

### Conclusion

The ongoing war signals a "purely qualitative breakthrough" in the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, with Hamas and the Palestinians accepting the cost required for maintaining the Palestinian cause viable. In reality, Gaza's citizens did not have a choice or a say in Hamas' agenda for attacking Israel, and certain individuals had lamented about paying a cost for such atrocities. However, voicing publicly in opposing the group and assessing the magnitude of this type of condemnation is tricky and it goes against the Palestinian outrage at Israeli's offensive strategies. Despite Israeli ambitions to wipe Hamas' identity, Israel has so far failed to assassinate its senior leaders, liberate the remaining hostages held by Hamas, or offer persuasive proof of how it can fulfil its aim of removing Hamas without massive civilian casualties. On the other other hand, remaining committed to eliminate the Jewish state, Hamas could claim triumph simply by living to fight another day.



Source: NBC News

[19] Vlahos, K. B. (2023, December 15). US ceasefire veto draws major backlash in Doha. Responsible Statecraft. <https://responsiblestatecraft.org/un-us-veto-ceasefire/>

[20] Wintour, P. (2023c, December 14). Gulf states press for two-state roadmap after UN vote on Israel-Gaza war. The Guardian. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/dec/13/gulf-states-press-for-two-state-roadmap-after-un-vote-on-israel-gaza-war>

## Russia-Ukraine Conflict: A Glance

1. *The economist*: <https://www.economist.com/graphic-detail/2023/12/02/americas-political-paralysis-is-complicating-its-support-for-ukraine?> <https://www.economist.com/the-world-ahead/2023/11/13/vladimir-putin-cannot-keep-funding-his-war-for-ever?> <https://www.economist.com/united-states/2023/10/26/the-republican-party-no-longer-believes-america-is-the-essential-nation?> <https://www.economist.com/europe/2023/12/11/volodymyr-zelensky-tries-to-shake-congress-out-of-paralysis?>
2. <https://www.newsweek.com/crimea-bridge-kerch-oil-depot-ukraine-drone-strikes-russia-shahed-1849496>
3. *Deccan Herald*.: <https://www.deccanherald.com/world/eu-summit-decides-to-launch-membership-talks-with-ukraine-2811917>

### Ukrainian Counter Offensive

Ukraine has targeted Russian-controlled Crimea with drones in an overnight raid on Dec 05, 2023, Russia's Defense Ministry has said, as both Moscow and Kyiv keep up the pace of intensified winter drone attacks on key infrastructure.

### Military Aid

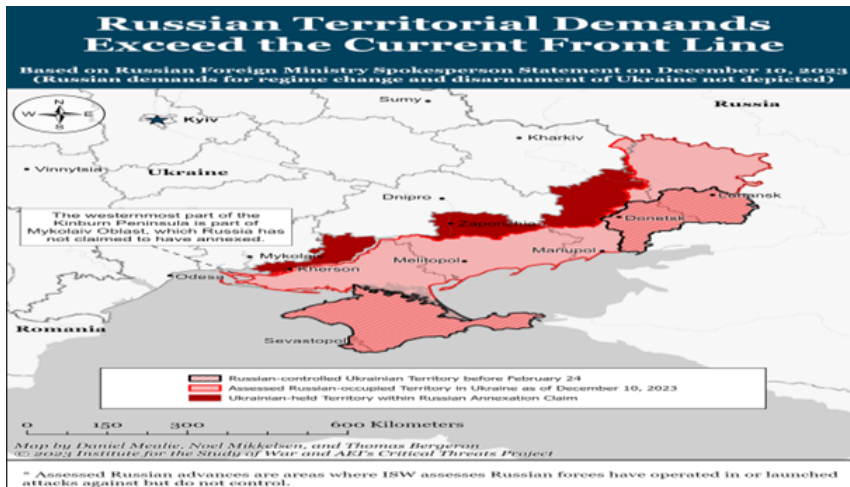
On Dec 06, 2023, Republicans in the Senate blocked President Joe Biden's funding bill, which includes \$ 61bn for Ukraine (and \$14bn for Israel), demanding that aid be tied to immigration reforms. With just a week before the Senate adjourns for the holidays, Mr Zelensky's winter looks bleak. On November 20, Lloyd Austin, the secretary of defense for the United States, visited Kyiv to assure that the US will stand by Ukraine "both now and into the future." Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskiy met with U.S. lawmakers on Capitol Hill on Dec 12, 2023, to make a last-ditch plea to keep military support flowing. As of Dec 12, 2023, talks in Congress on providing more support for Ukraine have stalled. In Europe, too, the mood risks turning against Ukraine's long war. A European summit on December 14th and 15th had expected to approve a further €50bn (\$54bn) in EU aid and the start of formal accession talks for Ukraine to join the EU, despite opposition by Hungary. However, the European Union leaders unexpectedly agreed on Dec 14, 2023, to open membership talks with Ukraine, something Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban had vowed to block for weeks and had walked out of the meeting.

### Russian Offensive and Defence

Russia's Defense Ministry said on Tuesday that its air defense had shot down 41 Ukrainian aerial unmanned vehicles (UAVs) over the Moscow-controlled Crimean Peninsula and the Sea of Azov overnight on Dec 05, 2023. Russia is now on the offensive in the east. Vladimir Putin announced he will seek another six-year term as Russia's president ahead of elections set to take place next May. His re-election bid was expected; in 2020, he changed Russia's constitution to allow him to rule until 2036. President Vladimir Putin said on Dec 14, 2023, that Russia would press on with its war in Ukraine unless Kyiv did a deal that took Moscow's security concerns into account, adding that the goals of the "special military operation" would, in any case, be met. In this annual press conference, Putin said that Russia currently has a total of 617,000 troops fighting in battle zones in Ukraine.



## RUSSIA-UKRAINE CONFLICT



Source:

<https://www.understandingwar.org/backgrounder/russian-offensive-campaign-assessment-december-10-2023>

## COMMENTS

The battle for control of the electromagnetic spectrum will determine whether one side's battlefield transparency increases or decreases, with far-reaching implications for combat in the Ukraine and beyond. Russia is maintaining its lead in jammers and other electronic warfare as the Western suppliers will not part with their state-of-the-art equipment. The advent of pervasive surveillance using drones, satellites, and other technologies has resulted in tracking the movement of troops in real-time and on a near-transparent battlefield.

That makes sure that forces, once detected, are immediately hit by barrages of artillery rounds, missiles, and suicide drones. The need for improved anti-missile weapons in Ukraine has increased because of Russia's extensive deployment of drones and missiles and low radar cross-sections. Therefore, due to the technological stalemate, sustaining any attempt at a breakthrough has become a difficult proposition. Kyiv has failed to break through the counteroffensive through Russian defensive lines this year.

A military deadlock through the winter will drain Western support, which will ultimately help Russia. Ukraine badly needs support from its Western allies in its nearly two-year fight against Moscow's invasion, and the Biden Administration has so far yet to be able to get approval through the US Congress for an aid package of US \$ 60 Billion. The EU meeting to open membership talks with Ukraine is an encouraging move for Ukraine.

Despite shortages of skilled labour, managers, and high-quality engineers aggravated by military mobilisation and high interest rates, the Russian economy is all set to grow 3.5% this year, thanks to Russia's export focussed \$2.2 trillion economy. Russia's success in evading a Western oil price cap is helping drive a recovery in economic growth. The Hamas attack on Israel, too, has resulted in diverting the attention and supply of weapons.

# China Takes More Land In Bhutan Before Expected Border Deal

<https://www.chathamhouse.org/publications/the-world-today/2023-12/china-takes-more-land-bhutan-expected-border-deal#:~:text=After%20images%20reveal%20new%20Chinese,John%20Pollock%20and%20Damien%20Symon.>

China is continuing its unsanctioned programme of settlement construction across the contested border with Bhutan in the small kingdom's Himalayan north, according to satellite imagery from September. The new outposts in Bhutan's remote Jakarlung Valley, part of the Beyul Khenpajong region, may become permanent Chinese territory after an announcement on a border deal between the two countries expected soon. It is thought that Bhutan, in a major concession, will give up the land that China has seized in both Jakarlung and the neighbouring Menchuma Valley. In October, Tandi Dorji became the first Bhutanese foreign minister to travel to Beijing when he met Chinese Vice President Han Zheng, who described the long-running border talks as an 'historic opportunity'. The latest images of Jakarlung Valley show a Chinese settlement under construction and an extensive road network built by the Chinese in the area. Robert Barnett, a Tibet expert at SOAS, University of London, who has watched the China-Bhutan border dispute closely, told 'There have been two major waves of [Chinese] construction in the Jakarlung. We know that the Chinese authorities are energetically recruiting Tibetans to move to these new locations and putting a lot of money into major construction efforts there.'

## COMMENTS

The Chicken's Neck, also known as the Siliguri Corridor, is a strategically important location close to Bhutan's western borders. It gained prominence after the 2017 India-China Doklam dispute. China is now focusing on the northern border regions, nevertheless, after being stymied by the western corridor. September satellite photos show that China is still building unapproved settlements along the disputed boundary in the northern Himalayan area of Bhutan. As part of the Beyul Khenpajong region, the new outposts in the isolated Jakarlung Valley could become permanent Chinese territory in the approaching boundary agreement between the two nations. Throughout the sacred valley of Beyul in Bhutan, where most people practise Tibetan Buddhism, an obscure network of roads, structures, and military outposts has been built since 2015. The outside world has taken note of China's multidimensional development campaign within Bhutan. Satellite photography confirms that China is actively developing along Bhutan's northern borders; nevertheless, Bhutan has specifically opted to keep quiet about this activity, maybe unaware of its true scope. China has previously attempted, however unsuccessfully, to construct roads into Bhutan, mostly in its western regions. China and India engaged in a 73-day standoff in 2017 as China attempted to construct a road across the Doklam plateau in the southwest, close to the trijunction with India. Following that, China ceased building roads, which resulted in a 200-man force reduction. 2020 saw the establishment of Pangda, a small Chinese community in the thick subtropical forests close to Bhutan's southwest border.

## CHINA

But Gyalaphug's growth, which began five years before Pangda, is far more advanced, embracing entire districts instead of just one village. Notably, Gyalaphug's construction is entangled in controversy because it is located in an area that the Bhutanese hold in high regard for its religious significance. China has taken the lead in Bhutan's vital telecom industry, installing fibre optic connections, growing mobile networks, and setting up internet access points. Since 2009, Huawei has operated 3G and 4G telecommunication networks in Bhutan.



Source: Chatham House

China sent more than 80,000 tourists to Bhutan before the pandemic, but Bhutan knows that China might use tourism as a weapon, as it did against South Korea, Malaysia, and Taiwan. Thus, Bhutan is under intense pressure from China to forge diplomatic ties. Territorial dispute resolution is a step in that direction, although it may be temporarily delayed by China's aggressive actions against Thimphu and New Delhi. The new phase of cordial diplomatic relations between Bhutan and China call for the establishment of fresh parlays between India and its Himalayan neighbors.

## Italy Withdraws From China's Belt And Road Project

[http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/articleshow/105785340.cms?from=mdr&utm\\_source=contentofinterest&utm\\_medium=text&utm\\_campaign=cppst](http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/articleshow/105785340.cms?from=mdr&utm_source=contentofinterest&utm_medium=text&utm_campaign=cppst)

Italy has formally exited China's ambitious Belt and Road Initiative, dealing a blow to President Xi Jinping who is trying to revive the mega infrastructure project. The pact "has not produced the desired effects" and is no longer "a priority," Italian foreign minister Antonio Tajani said at a Rome event Wednesday hosted by newswire Adnkronos.

Countries not part of the pact "have had better results," he added. Italy became the only G7 nation to sign up for BRI four years ago. The long-anticipated decision was communicated to Beijing three days ago, according to Italian newspaper Corriere della Sera, which first reported the news.

**COMMENTS**

Italy, which had weathered three recessions in ten years, was in dire need of infrastructure development and investment when it joined the BRI in 2019. Nevertheless, the accord hasn't done anything for Italy four years later, thus the expected economic benefits haven't materialised. Chinese FDI (Foreign Direct Investment) in Italy decreased from USD 650 million in 2019 to just USD 33 million in 2021, according to data from the Council on Foreign Relations. Italy's commerce with China has climbed from 14.5 billion euros to just 18.5 billion euros since joining the BRI, while China's trade with Italy has increased from 33.5 billion euros to 50.9 billion euros.

Italy's reevaluation fits into a larger pattern of European countries reevaluating their ties to China. Italy has reevaluated its position on the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) due to worries about China's growing influence, geopolitical alignments, and strategic ramifications, especially in light of recent international events like the conflict between Russia and Ukraine. The Comprehensive Agreement on Investment (CAI) between the EU and China fell apart in April. Estonia and Latvia withdrew from the 17+1, China's diplomatic initiative in the countries of Central and Eastern Europe, last year. In 2021, Lithuania had left. Italy's inclination to align itself more closely with its Western allies, especially in the G7, might influence its decision regarding the BRI. With the G7 presidency upcoming, Italy might see leaving the BRI as a gesture of solidarity with Western allies. The BRI has faced criticism globally for potential debt traps and lack of transparency in financial dealings. Reports of other countries facing substantial debt burdens due to their participation in the BRI might be contributing to Italy's Withdrawal.

There is a chance that India and Italy will have greater economic collaboration now that Italy is leaving the BRI. Opportunities for trade, investment, and cooperative ventures in industries such as manufacturing, technology, renewable energy, medicines, and infrastructure development might be investigated by both nations. India and Italy have the potential to strengthen their strategic alliance in a number of areas, such as cybersecurity, defence, counterterrorism, and marine security. Security ties can be strengthened by cooperative efforts in information sharing, joint military exercises, and defence manufacture.



*Source: Mint*

## Nepal Urges Russia not to Recruit its Citizens into Army; Says Six Killed

<https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/international/world-news/nepal-urges-russia-not-to-recruit-its-citizens-into-army-says-six-killed/articleshow/105745276.cms>

Nepal said it has asked Moscow not to recruit its citizens into the Russian Army and immediately send back any Nepali soldier commissioned there back to the Himalayan nation after revealing six soldiers serving Russia's military had been killed. Nepali soldiers have been serving the British and Indian Armies under an agreement. The small Himalayan nation, wedged between China and India, has no such agreement with Russia, which invaded neighbouring Ukraine in February 2022 and has been engaged in a war since then.

Nepal Government said in a statement that six of its nationals, who had been serving the Russian Army, were killed, without providing any details.

"The Government of Nepal has requested the Russian Government to immediately return their bodies and pay compensation to their families," the foreign ministry said late on Monday. Diplomatic efforts were underway to get one Nepali citizen serving the Russian Army and captured by Ukraine released, the statement added. Nepal also urged its citizens not to join the army of any war-torn country. English daily, The Kathmandu Post, quoted Milan Raj Tuladhar, Nepal's Ambassador in Moscow, as saying that 150-200 Nepalis were working as mercenaries in the Russian Army. The Russian Embassy in Kathmandu did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

### COMMENTS

There have been media reports earlier on Nepalese citizens fighting for the Russian Army, to which the Nepalese Government had not responded. The Nepalese communication urging Russian Government to return the bodies of Nepalese soldiers killed, payment of compensation to their families and putting an end to recruitment of Nepalese in Russian Army is a bold and positive diplomatic move making the Nepalese Government policies clear on the matter, which at the same time also appears to be urging the Nepalese citizens not to get recruited in the Russian Army.



Source: Al Jazeera

## Myanmar Junta Leader says Armed Organisations must Solve Their Problems 'Politically' - State Media

<https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/myanmar-junta-leader-says-armed-organisations-must-solve-their-problems-2023-12-05/>

Myanmar's Junta leader Min Aung Hlaing has called on armed ethnic groups involved in an offensive against the country's ruling military to solve their problems "politically", state media reported on Tuesday. He warned that "if armed organisations keep on being foolish, residents of the relevant regions will suffer bad impacts. So, it is necessary to consider the lives of the people and those organisations need to solve their problems politically," the Global New Light of Myanmar newspaper reported. Myanmar's military is facing the biggest challenge to its grip on the nation since taking power in a 2021 coup, after three ethnic minority forces launched a coordinated offensive in late October, capturing some towns, including major border trade zones and military posts. A parallel civilian government backing some of the armed rebel groups dismissed Min Aung Hlaing's call for dialogue. "As they are losing badly on the ground, they are trying to find an exit route. There would be genuine dialogue, if the military guarantees that it no longer has a role in politics; they must be under an elected government," said Kyaw Zaw, a spokesperson for the parallel National Unity Government. Amid fighting in Shan State on the border with China and Rakhine and Chin States in the West, dozens of military and police officials have surrendered, according to media and footage verified by Reuters. Tens of thousands of residents have been displaced by the fighting, according to the United Nations.

### COMMENTS



Source: Reuters

There appears to be increased battlefield pressure on Myanmar military, since it seized power from the elected government of Aung San Suu Kyi in February 2021, owing to multiple reasons to include, loss of control due to successful actions of rebels in various parts of Myanmar, PLA units having assumed control of border crossings in the areas to handle clashes between MNDAA and the local militia, some possible interference in internal affairs of Myanmar by China including media reports on China of backing 'Three Brotherhood Alliance' (comprising three rebel groups in Myanmar). If the Myanmar Junta finds the situation deteriorating further against them, they may consider some engagement with the rebel groups.

# Myanmar's Army is Facing Battlefield Challenges and Grants Amnesty to Troops Jailed for being AWOL

<https://www.thehindu.com/news/international/myanmars-army-is-facing-battlefield-challenges-and-grants-amnesty-to-troops-jailed-for-being-awol/article67619152.ece>

Myanmar's military government has been freeing soldiers and police who had been jailed for desertion and absence without leave, seeking to get them to return to active duty, a police officer and an Army officer said on Thursday. The releases follow an amnesty plan announced earlier this week to get them back into service in order to ease an apparent manpower shortage. A police captain in the capital, Naypyitaw, who spoke on condition of anonymity told The Associated Press that many police personnel, who were convicted of offenses including desertion and absence without leave were released on Thursday, which marked National Victory Day, the anniversary of the 1920 breakout of organized activities against British colonial rule. It's traditional to have mass prisoner releases on national holidays. An army officer in the capital, who also spoke on condition of anonymity, said that the military since last month has been granting amnesty to convicted soldiers and police, who were serving prison sentences of up to three years. The action of the military government came after state-run newspapers on Monday reported that the military would grant amnesty to soldiers, who have committed minor crimes, who wish to return to active service. Maj Gen Zaw Min Tun, the spokesperson for the ruling military council, was quoted on Tuesday in state media as saying that about 1,000 soldiers who deserted, or went absent without leave or had retired, had gone through the process of requesting the military for their return to service. "If the soldiers who have been declared absent without leave before Dec 3 return with the intention of serving in the army again, we will consider it as a case of absence without leave instead of desertion and will carry out the acceptance process in order for them to serve," he said. According to Myanmar's Defence Services Act, deserting the army is punishable by a minimum sentence of seven years imprisonment up to the death penalty. According to a Nov 30 report by the underground group People's Goal, which encourages and supports defections from the security forces, nearly 450 members of the military surrendered, defected or deserted after the Arakan Army, the Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army and the Ta'ang National Liberation Army, calling themselves the Three Brotherhood Alliance, launched a coordinated offensive against military targets on Oct 27. The alliance has claimed widespread victories, including the seizure of more than 200 military posts and four border crossing gates on the border with China, controlling crucial trade and has said the military has suffered hundreds killed in action. In September, the defence ministry of the National Unity Government, a major opposition group that acts as a shadow government, said that more than 14,000 troops have defected from the military since the 2021 seizure of power.

## COMMENTS

Myanmar Military is facing severe challenges since late October 2023, ever since alliance of three ethnic minority armed groups launched an offensive in the Northern Part of Shan State, on the North Eastern border with China, which ignited nationwide renewed fighting, resulting in military forces getting thinner and exposing an evident shortage of troops. Granting amnesty to troops, who deserted the service may help the Myanmar Army get some desired trained manpower and at the same time may dilute some service conditions for the soldiers to prevent further desertion/absence without leave.

# China Mediated Myanmar Junta Peace Talks with Rebels - Foreign Ministry

[https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/china-says-it-facilitated-myanmar-militarys-talks-with-rebel-groups-2023-12-14/#:~:text=BEIJING%2C%20Dec%202014%20\(Reuters\),caused%20worry%20in%20neighbouring%20China](https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/china-says-it-facilitated-myanmar-militarys-talks-with-rebel-groups-2023-12-14/#:~:text=BEIJING%2C%20Dec%202014%20(Reuters),caused%20worry%20in%20neighbouring%20China)

China has mediated peace talks between Myanmar's ruling military and rebel groups and the parties agreed on a temporary ceasefire and to maintain dialogue, Beijing said on Thursday. The fighting, largely in Northern Shan State, has caused worry in neighbouring China. Around 300,000 people have been displaced since a rebel offensive began on Oct 27, according to the UN, which says more than 2 million people have been made homeless since Myanmar's military coup in February 2021. The talks were held in China in recent days, the Chinese foreign ministry said in a statement, without giving more details. China hopes that the parties concerned in Myanmar will implement the agreements and the consensus reached, exercise maximum restraint and take the initiative to ease the situation on the ground, it said. "China has been working tirelessly to stop the war and promote talks among the relevant parties in Myanmar and has pushed for the de-escalation and cooling-down of the situation," ministry spokesperson Mao Ning said. Mao said there had been a marked decline in the number of clashes and exchanges of fire in Northern Myanmar, "which not only serves the interests of the relevant parties in Myanmar, but also contributes to the maintenance of tranquility along the China-Myanmar border". Myanmar's military had said on Monday it met with the rebels and other parties in the conflict and another round of talks was due by the end of the month, without elaborating. On Wednesday, however, the ethnic minority insurgent alliance reaffirmed its commitment to defeat what it called Myanmar's "dictatorship" and made no mention of peace talks or a ceasefire. The rebel alliance comprises three groups - the Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army (MNDAA), the Ta'ang National Liberation Army (TNLA) and the Arakan Army (AA).

## COMMENTS

The Myanmar Junta appears to be losing some ground in the ongoing internal conflict in Myanmar, which is evident from the recent developments related to appeal by Junta leader to armed ethnic groups to solve their problems politically and Myanmar providing amnesty to military and police deserters to rejoin the forces. There were earlier media reports on Chinese interference in internal affairs of Myanmar, China backing 'Three Brotherhood Alliance' and Pro Military Myanmar groups protesting against Chinese interference in Myanmar. All these developments appear to have created a complex situation in Myanmar, with apparently no one in control of the evolving situation. China feels that any further deterioration of the situation in Myanmar may hurt Chinese interests and it seems to be stepping in to take control of the situation in Myanmar. Some meaningful engagement of Myanmar Junta with the rebel groups may be expected in next few weeks.





The data released by the Pakistan Institute for Conflict and Security Studies indicates that there has been 80 percent rise in militant attacks in Pakistan in the first half of this year with Khyber Pakhtunkhwa emerging as the province most affected (51 attacks resulting in 54 fatalities and 81 injuries).[3][4] If claims of the provincial police are to be believed, between June 18, 2022 and Jun 18, 2023, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa has suffered 665 militant attacks with the leading affected districts of Dera Ismail Khan (81 attacks), Peshawar (56 attacks) and Bajaur (51 attacks).[5]The responsibility for many of these attacks has been claimed by the TTP which appears to be re-consolidating itself and becoming bolder in its actions. The TTP aims to replace the current government of Pakistan with an Afghan Taliban-like conservative Islamic political and legal system. The Pakistani establishment has been trying to deal with only the symptoms of the problem and not addressing the root causes. The economic neglect of the north-western provinces, and the political and social neglect of the people thereof are the contributory factors to the escalating situation in these areas. Also, the relations between the Afghan Taliban and the Pakistan governments have been nose-diving with the latter's expulsion of Afghan migrants to their nation having further exacerbated the situation. There have also been murmurs of a limited attack across the border in Afghanistan in the Pakistani military establishment to control the TTP problem.

Baluchistan's caretaker Information Minister Jan Achakzai was also found stating that a demarche to the Afghan government would do no good. He, in fact, went on to propose seven counter-terrorism measures on a social media platform that included reprisal attacks in Afghanistan, special targeted operations, air strikes, border closure with Afghanistan, repatriation of Afghan refugees, anti-TTA political opposition gathering in Islamabad and offering the US drone bases to target al-Qaeda and other terrorist sanctuaries in Afghanistan, though he later deleted his post. But a limited war in Afghanistan does not seem very practical and probable due to various reasons. First of all, for such an action, Pakistan would need international support which seems very unlikely. Secondly, the economic situation of Pakistan does not permit it to undertake such a military offensive unless it is able to play the US into helping it who is definitely not ready to meddle in Afghanistan again. And lastly but most importantly, TTP is a large movement with deep roots inside Pakistan. Therefore, a limited war in Afghanistan may be able to disrupt the TTP movement but will not be able to eliminate the TTP problem.

---

[3] Ibid.

[4] Khan, Haq Nawaz. "Pakistani suicide bomber attack on army outpost kills 23 soldiers". The Washington Post, December 12, 2023. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2023/12/12/pakistan-taliban-attack-army-dera-ismail-khan/>

[5] Mehsud, Ihsanullah Tipu. "The attacks in DI Khan are a sign of times to come if Pakistan doesn't fix its act soon". The Dawn, December 13, 2023. <https://www.dawn.com/news/1797294/the-attacks-in-di-khan-are-a-sign-of-times-to-come-if-pakistan-doesnt-fix-its-act-soon>

# US-Adani Deal For Sri Lanka Port Heats Up Race With China

<https://www.livemint.com/opinion/online-views/usadani-deal-for-sri-lanka-port-heats-up-race-with-china-11699601743547.html>

The US International Development Finance Corporation's \$553 million investment in the West Container Terminal of Colombo port underscores the intense contest between the US and China to build infrastructure in the Indian Ocean.

## COMMENTS

The Adani Group is in the process of developing the West Container Terminal of Colombo port in Sri Lanka. The group shares a 51% stake in the project, the remaining being owned by John Keells Holdings, a Sri Lankan conglomerate and the state-run Sri Lanka Ports Authority. The US International Development Finance Corporation (DFC) is investing US\$ 553 million in the project which is budgeted to cost around US\$ 700 million to construct. The East Container Terminal of the port is being constructed by the China Harbour Engineering Company, the memorandum of cooperation for development of which was earlier signed with India and Japan in May 2019 during the previous Sirisena government but was later cancelled in Feb 2021.



Source: LiveMint

The investment by the US in this project in Sri Lanka, amounting to almost four-fifths of the total cost, is one of its kind in terms of the magnitude of the finance. It may be an attempt by the US to increase its influence in the region. China already owns a 99 year lease of the Hambantota port in Sri Lanka and has invested huge in highways and infrastructure projects in Sri Lanka and other South Asian countries. The regular foray of Chinese research ships and submarines into the waters of the Indian Ocean, especially close enough to the coasts of other countries like India to be able to spy on their activities and map the ocean floors, is already a cause of serious concern.

The Chinese loans to the weaker economies in the region and investments in infrastructure projects therein, as part of its various initiatives, has been termed “debt-trap diplomacy” by various others on account of these nations defaulting on their loan payments or their inability to reap any serious benefits from these projects. The US has little footprint financially in South Asian countries. It has mostly been aids which also, have not always been welcomed. There is, probably, an opportunity for India and the US to collaborate and exploit the sway of the former with the South Asian Nations and the economic strength of the latter and provide the smaller nations in the region another option for financing and investments other than China. This would help them create more balance with respect to China and help in tilting the scale in their favour.

# Colombo Security Conclave Agrees on Roadmap for Security in Indian Ocean Region

<https://www.msn.com/en-in/news/India/colombo-security-conclave-agrees-on-roadmap-for-security-in-indian-ocean-region/ar-AA119T4>

The Colombo Security Conclave, a grouping that includes India, Sri Lanka, Mauritius and the Maldives, on 07 December 2023 agreed on a roadmap to ensure the security and stability of the Indian Ocean region in the face of non-traditional and emerging hybrid challenges. National Security Adviser Ajit Doval represented India at the sixth meeting of senior security officials of the Colombo Security Conclave in Port Louis, Mauritius. Besides Doval's counterparts from Sri Lanka and Mauritius, the meeting was joined by senior officials from Bangladesh and Seychelles. The member states reiterated the role and responsibility of the Colombo Security Conclave in ensuring the safety, security and stability of the Indian Ocean amid traditional, non-traditional and emerging hybrid challenges.

## COMMENTS

The Colombo Security Conclave was established in 2020, when India, Sri Lanka and the Maldives agreed to expand the scope of their trilateral meeting on maritime cooperation. Mauritius joined the conclave at the fifth meeting of the grouping in Male in March 2022. Bangladesh and Seychelles have been participating in the meetings of the Colombo Security Conclave as observer states. Cooperation under the conclave focuses on five pillars – maritime safety and security, countering terrorism and radicalisation, combating trafficking and transnational organised crime, cyber-security and protection of critical infrastructure, and humanitarian assistance and disaster relief.

Amid growing tilt towards China, Maldives, which is one of the founding members, skipped a key security meeting. The development occurred on the same day when Maldives Vice President Hussain Mohamed Latheef was in China for the meeting of 'China-Indian Ocean Region Forum on Development Cooperation,' organised by the China International Development Cooperation Agency (CIDCA).



Source: Hindustan Times

Over the past year, the members of the grouping and observer states have participated in several activities to include investigation of terrorism cases, narcotics trafficking, cyber-crime, countering the financing of terrorism, marine pollution, maritime law, coastal security, oceanography and hydrography and cyber-security. As a follow-up to the conference, an Ocean Information Services portal was launched during the meeting in Mauritius.

# China to launch Cooperation and Training Programs to enhance Blue Economy Cooperation with Indian Ocean Countries

<https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/202312/1303289.shtml>

China is planning to implement various projects on poverty alleviation, clean energy and other fields in the Indian Ocean region, and conduct training programs to cultivate talents in areas such as disaster relief, green development and climate change, as part of a plan to boost blue economy cooperation with regional countries, said a Chinese official at the second China-Indian Ocean Region Forum on Blue Economy Cooperation organised by China International Development Cooperation Agency (CIDCA) an agency which has been created to ensure better coordination and implementation of various China aided projects viz BRI.

## COMMENTS

China has been actively engaging with Indian Ocean Countries through various forums and initiatives and the move is China's yet another attempt to increase its sphere of influence and grip in the Indian Ocean Region. It also reflects upon its designs to checkmate India's dominance and key role in the region through multinational forums viz IORA.

Over 350 representatives from more than 20 countries and international organizations participated in the forum including Maldives wherein China committed to implement 200 small-scale projects in the local area, including in the fields of agriculture, poverty reduction, healthcare, and clean energy.

A "Blue Talent" program will be implemented to train 20,000 talents in various fields for Indian Ocean countries in the next three years, and 100 special training programs will be established in fields such as disaster prevention and reduction, green development, climate change response, and marine planning.

## Implications for India

Maldives attending the meet in Kunming at cost of skipping the Colombo Security Conclave in Mauritius is a cause of concern for India and hence there is a need to adopt a more proactive approach by India towards engaging Maldives as a major partner in its SAGAR diplomacy and Blue Economy goals.

# The Wide Array Of Economic Sectors Covered Under The PGI's Lobito Corridor Is Aimed At Countering Chinese Presence In African Countries

<https://www.orfonline.org/expert-speak/the-lobito-corridor>

Sitting on troves of unexplored critical mineral resources such as cobalt, copper, and lithium, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Tanzania, and Zambia are emerging as theatres of great power competition in Africa. A new infrastructure undertaking which was conceived under the United States' (US) Partnership for Global Infrastructure and Investment (PGII) initiative—the Lobito Corridor connecting these three countries, is rapidly emerging as a counter to China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) in these countries.



Located in Central Africa, the Corridor proposes to build a railway line connecting the critical minerals mines in Zambia and DRC with the Lobito port in Angola. The project also proposes investments in green energy development, sustainable mining, energy storage to social infrastructure development and public health initiatives. The wide array of economic sectors covered under the PGI's Lobito Corridor is aimed at presenting a counterweight to Chinese presence in the region.

China's 'infrastructure projects for loans and minerals' strategy. For over a decade, China has pursued a strategy to dominate critical minerals supply chains worldwide through the BRI. It has borne favourable outcomes in Africa. Today, Beijing controls close to 70 percent of industrial cobalt and copper exploration projects in DRC. Besides, it has invested close to US\$ 4.5 billion in lithium mining in other central African countries such as Zimbabwe, Angola, and Namibia.

The promise of Lobito Corridor. The US is now gearing up to counter China's dominance in Central Africa through the Lobito Corridor. Conceived under the PGI—a transnational infrastructure development programme launched by the G7, the Corridor promises to upgrade infrastructure and connectivity in DRC, Zambia, and Angola. While the US has also adopted the positive economic reinforcement model, there are certain differences in the G7's approach to infrastructure development diplomacy.

The difference lies in its financing model, debt-repayment structure, focus on sustainability, capacity-building measures and labour relations. PGII investments catalyse economic growth in these countries by synergising already existing low-credit facilities provided by the World Bank Group and African Development Bank with new credit provided by private PGII partners such as the Citi Group. The G7 initiative also provides these countries with critical financial products such as longer tender local currency financing, and long-dated currency and interest rate hedges which are instrumental in attracting foreign investments in developing economies and assisting growth of small and medium enterprises in recipient nations. The G7's involvement of local companies is also noteworthy and stands in stark contrast to Beijing's model wherein both—the lender and project contractor (and in several cases the labour employed) were Chinese. Moreover, these investments flow through the Official Development Assistance (ODA) flows, thereby qualifying for concessional interest rates similar to those of multilateral banks, reducing financial pressures on already debt-distressed governments. In fact, in economic sectors such as social infrastructure and public health, cash flows from the PGII are proposed as official grants. As ODA flows, these concessional loans also have a longer grace period and loan repayment timeline as compared to Chinese OOF flows. This time around the G7 promises to adopt a different approach, having learned lessons from China's missteps. The PGII is strategically targeting the weak links in China's infrastructure diplomacy with a focus on sustainability, transparency in financing and investments, capacity building and massive involvement of local companies and populations. To the West as to China, winning the central African states is critical to winning the rare minerals global supply chain race and power the future. What remains to be seen is how efficiently the G7 will and its allies deliver on their PGII promises.

## Regional Implications

**Diversification of Infrastructure Influence and Enhanced Economic Growth:** By fostering the development of this corridor, the West aims to diversify and balance the influence of major players, offering Central African nations greater autonomy in choosing their economic partners. The corridor's completion would significantly improve connectivity for landlocked countries, promoting trade and economic growth. Improved infrastructure facilitates the movement of goods and people, fostering regional cooperation and stability.

**Geopolitical Reorientation:** Nations investing in the corridor may align themselves with specific global powers, potentially reshaping regional alliances and power dynamics.

**India's Strategic Opportunities:** India, with its growing economic influence, can strategically engage with countries along the Lobito Corridor. Establishing economic partnerships, trade agreements, and infrastructure development collaborations can enhance India's presence in the region. Central Africa is rich in natural resources, including oil and minerals. India, with its increasing energy needs, could explore partnerships to secure a stable supply of resources through investments and trade agreements in the corridor.

**Counterbalancing Chinese Influence:** India's involvement in the Lobito Corridor can act as a counterbalance to Chinese dominance in the region. Offering an alternative investment source, India can contribute to a more diversified and balanced regional development landscape.

# The Military Regime Resulting From The July Coup In Niger Announced Monday That It Was Ending Two European Union (EU) Security And Defence Missions In The Country, As It Welcomed A Russian Delegation To Niamey.

<https://www.africanews.com/2023/12/05/niger-ends-2-eu-security-missions/>

The Nigerien Ministry of Foreign Affairs announced in a press release the denunciation of the agreement entered into by the State of Niger with the European Union relating to the European civilian mission "EUCAP Sahel Niger", active since 2012. This mission is based in Niamey and says it has 120 Europeans and supports "internal security forces, the Nigerien authorities as well as non-governmental actors". The ministry also declared the "withdrawal by the State of Niger of the consent granted for the deployment of an EU military partnership mission" in Niger named "EUMPM".

**Regional Implications:** The termination of EU missions in Niger represents a setback for the EU's influence in the region. It raises questions about the efficacy of external interventions in preserving stability and democracy, potentially impacting the EU's ability to assert its values in the Sahel region.

**Rising Russian Influence:** The welcoming of a Russian delegation amid the EU mission termination underscores a growing trend of African nations diversifying their international partnerships. Russia's engagement in Niger suggests an alternative avenue for diplomatic and security cooperation, potentially challenging Western dominance in the region.

**Re balancing of Strategic Competition:** The convergence of EU mission termination and Russian engagement creates a scenario of strategic competition. As major powers seek influence in the Sahel, the region may become a focal point for geopolitical rivalries, impacting the delicate balance of power in West Africa. The weakening of EU influence, the rise of Russian involvement, and shifts in security dynamics underscore the complex geopolitical landscape in the Sahel.



Source: Africa News



# India Provides \$250 Million Line Of Credit To Kenya For Agricultural Modernisation

<https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/modi-meets-kenyan-president-william-ruto-dollar-250-million-loc-agri-sector-modernisation/article67606983.ece>

India on Tuesday extended a \$250 million Line of Credit for modernisation of agriculture in Kenya. Announcing the initiative PM Modi said both sides will carry out joint military exercises and will collaborate on counter-terror projects. Welcoming the Indian initiatives, President William Samoei Ruto, described the Indian community of Kenya as a “bridge” between the two countries and said Indians residing in Kenya regard his country as their “first country”. “As two agricultural economies, we have agreed to share experiences in this field. We have decided to extend a Line of Credit of \$250 million for modernisation of the agricultural sector in Kenya. According to the needs of our times, we will increase partnership in innovation and technology,” said Prime Minister Narendra Modi. Mr Modi also announced that Kenya has expressed interest in joining the International Solar Alliance and Global Biofuels Alliance. The agriculture Line of Credit, officials said will be used to advance projects that will be taken up subsequently. According to a joint statement issued after the visit, Kenya has “offered, in line with Kenyan laws, to provide land to Indian companies and institutions for cultivation of crops, including millets, in Kenya.” “Both sides noted that enhancing bilateral agricultural cooperation would increase bilateral trade and contribute to food security in Kenya,” The two sides agreed to cooperate in cyber security, anti-money laundering, small arms and weapons, drugs and human trafficking.

## COMMENTS

### Implications

**Bolstering Economic Diplomacy:** By investing in Kenya's agricultural sector, India aims to strengthen bilateral ties, fostering a mutually beneficial partnership in the realm of economic development. As Kenya modernizes its agriculture, there are opportunities for Indian businesses to participate in the development and trade of agricultural technologies, machinery, and expertise.

**Regional Impact on Neighbouring Countries:** Neighbouring nations might be inspired to emulate these practices, contributing to regional agricultural advancement. India's investment in Kenya's agriculture can stimulate economic integration and cooperation in East Africa. Improved agricultural productivity in Kenya can lead to surplus production, facilitating cross-border trade and economic collaboration among neighbouring nations. India's \$250 million Line of Credit for agricultural modernization in Kenya is a strategic investment with multifaceted implications.

The initiative has the potential to positively impact the neighbouring countries of Kenya. By fostering economic integration, promoting sustainable agriculture.

# Philippines, China Trade Accusations Over South China Sea Collision

<https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/philippines-says-china-rammed-water-cannoned-resupply-vessels-2023-12-10/>

The Philippines and China traded accusations on Sunday over a collision of their vessels near a disputed shoal in the South China Sea as tensions over claims in the vital waterway escalate. The Philippine coast guard accused China of firing water cannons and ramming resupply vessels and a coast guard ship, causing "serious engine damage" to one, while China's coast guard said the Philippine vessel intentionally rammed its ship.

China claims almost the entire South China Sea, a conduit for more than \$3 trillion of annual ship-borne commerce, including parts claimed by the Philippines, Vietnam, Indonesia, Malaysia and Brunei. The Permanent Court of Arbitration in 2016 said China's claims had no legal basis. Beijing and Manila have been playing cat-and-mouse around the uninhabited Second Thomas Shoal in the Philippines' exclusive economic zone when the Philippines deploys resupply missions for Filipino soldiers living aboard an aging warship deliberately run aground in 1999 to protect Manila's maritime claims.

## COMMENTS



The South China Sea dispute between China and the Philippines has significant repercussions beyond the region. The dispute over territorial rights, a key factor in international trade, has been exacerbated by the 2016 Permanent Court of Arbitration decision, which dismissed China's claims. The free movement of navigation, vital for over \$3 trillion worth of maritime commerce, could be negatively impacted by any disruption. India's interest in the South China Sea, based on economic ties and strategic concerns, could be affected. The deterioration in US-China relations could impact the Asia-Pacific region's geopolitical balance. The ASEAN Unity, a key player in regional issues, could be disrupted by the dispute. Diplomatic efforts are needed to alleviate tensions and achieve peaceful resolutions.

# China's President Xi Visits Vietnam Hail Upgrade Of Ties; Agree To Boost Security Efforts Looking To Build Up More Resilient Ties

<https://www.reuters.com/world/chinas-xi-meets-vietnam-leaders-second-day-state-visit-hanoi-2023-12-13/>

China's President Xi Jinping visited Vietnam on Dec. 12-13 to meet top state officials and discuss upgrading the two countries' relations. China and Vietnam agreed to step up co-operation on security matters in their move towards becoming a community with a "shared future", they said on Wednesday, as Chinese President Xi Jinping wrapped up a visit to Hanoi.

On Xi's two-day trip, the Communist-ruled neighbours, close in economic areas but at odds over boundaries in the South China Sea, signed dozens of co-operation pacts and agreed to set up more hotlines to defuse any emergencies in the contested waters. In a 16-page joint statement, the countries, which share a millennia-long history of conflict, vowed to work more closely to strengthen defence industry ties and intelligence exchanges. They said their aim was partly to avert the risk of what they called a "colour revolution" promoted by hostile forces, using a term for popular uprisings that have shaken former Communist nations. They "announced the establishment of a strategic China-Vietnam community of 'shared future' to promote the upgrading of China-Vietnam relations," Xi told the chairman of Vietnam's parliament, Vuong Dinh Hue.

Xi has pushed hard for the upgrade in ties, especially after Vietnam elevated the United States in September to the highest tier of its diplomatic ranking, the same as China's. As China and the United States vie for influence in the strategic nation, the pacts mark an achievement for Vietnam's "Bamboo" diplomacy, although analysts and diplomats said the improvement in relations could be more symbolic than real. Xi's visit to Vietnam, which is home to a growing number of Chinese manufacturers, is only his fourth overseas this year after trips to Russia, South Africa and the United States.

## COMMENTS

The visit of President Xi Jinping to Vietnam and his efforts to improve relations between China and Vietnam hold significant implications for both India and ASEAN. Beijing agree on building 'shared future' with deals reached on rail, telecoms, but not rare earths. Both committed for closer security, intelligence ties. China's commitment to maintaining regional stability and economic cooperation with Vietnam could contribute to regional stability, especially given Vietnam's status as a key player in ASEAN. However, the economic reliance of certain ASEAN countries on China could affect the region's equilibrium. India's "Act East" policy aims to enhance diplomatic relations with ASEAN member states, and the ongoing tumultuous relations between China and ASEAN, including Vietnam, may impact India's regional engagement. Opportunities for collaboration between India and ASEAN nations seeking to diversify strategic and economic partnerships may arise.

# Beijing Accuses US Navy Of 'Illegally' Entering South China Sea Territory

<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/12/4/us-navy-ship-illegally-intruded-in-south-china-sea-territory-says-china>

China has claimed that a US naval ship has “illegally intruded” its South China Sea territorial waters. A Chinese naval force was mobilised to track the USS Gabrielle Gifford on Monday when it ventured near the waters of the Second Thomas Shoal, Beijing said. The reef is part of the Spratly Islands, an area that is the centre of a territorial dispute between China and the Philippines. “The US deliberately disrupted the situation in the South China Sea,” the People’s Chinese ships regularly block Philippine supply ships from reaching the BRP Sierra Madre on the contested Second Thomas Shoal, in the South China Sea.

Liberation Army Southern Theatre asserted in a statement. The release also accused the United States of “seriously [violating] China’s sovereignty and security ... [undermining] regional peace and stability, and ... [of violating] international law and basic norms governing international relations.” Second Thomas Shoal, known as Ayungin Shoal in the Philippines, lies about 195km (121 miles) northwest of the Philippine province of Palawan. It has been. Site of several incidents this year as Manila has sought to resupply the rusting warship that it intentionally ran aground in 1999 to serve as a military outpost.

## COMMENTS



The alleged entry of a U.S. Navy ship into South China Sea territory, near the Second Thomas Shoal, has significant implications for India and ASEAN. The incident exacerbates regional tensions and threatens ASEAN's unity, as differing viewpoints among member states may undermine the organization's effectiveness. The territorial disputes in the South China Sea, including the Philippines, may affect ASEAN member states' strategies to protect their maritime interests.

India's geopolitical balance in the Indo-Pacific region, which is crucial for its "Act East" policy, could be disrupted by intensifying hostilities. The incident could also affect India's maritime interests, as the South China Sea is a critical maritime pathway for international commerce. The ongoing developments could incentivize India to strengthen its strategic alliances in the Indo-Pacific region.

# U.S. Defense Bill Strengthens Military Ties With AUKUS, Japan

<https://asia.nikkei.com/Politics/International-relations/Indo-Pacific/U.S.-defense-bill-strengthens-military-ties-with-AUKUS-Japan>

More integrated military operations with AUKUS and Japan, two major projects that could alter the defense posture in the Indo-Pacific for years to come, received the stamp of approval from the U.S. Congress this week, as the annual defense policy bill was finalized between House and Senate lawmakers. The compromise between each chamber's version of the National Defense Authorization Act published Wednesday night kicked off plans to offer Australia nuclear-powered submarines under the three-way AUKUS pact with the U.K.

## COMMENTS

As a part of the yearly defence spending package, US senators approved the \$886 billion National Defence Authorization Act (NDAA), by a vote of 310-118 which would be later signed into law by President Joe Biden. The "Department of Defense's 2024" policy and spending goals bill is \$28 billion greater than the previous year's budget bill, or roughly 3% more.

Rep. Mike Rogers, Chairman of the House Armed Services Committee, affirmed:

"The NDAA is one of the most consequential bills Congress considers. Passage of this bill each year sends an important signal to the men and women defending our freedom that Congress can function and will prioritize their needs. Above all else, enacting the NDAA has never been more vital than today. America and our allies face unprecedented and rapidly evolving threats from China, Russia, Iran, North Korea and terrorist organizations throughout the world." [1]

The bill has authorised an increase of 5.2 percent for US service troops, continue "Ukraine Security Assistance Initiative until 2027" and most importantly an increased military cooperation with Japan and the AUKUS, the two significant initiatives that could change the security scenario of Indo-Pacific for the upcoming years. Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer stated:

"We'll strengthen our resources in the Indo-Pacific, to deter aggression by the Chinese government, and give resources for the military in Taiwan. We'll give DOD more resources to deploy and develop AI, protect against foreign cyber threats, increase the transparency of Unidentified Aerial Phenomena." [2] The increase in the budget would authorise \$14.7 billion for the Pacific Deterrence Initiative. This would be extended through fiscal year 2024 in response to Chinese aggression. Additionally, it would create a programme for Taiwan's military forces that would include training, counselling, and institutional capacity-building. In addition, this increase would permit Australia to eventually purchase nuclear-capable submarines and enable the US, UK, and Australia to implement the AUKUS accord. Most significantly, the bill would create the Indo-Pacific Campaigning Initiative, which would enable the US Indo-Pacific Command to undertake exercises more frequently and on a larger scale. Apart from Australia, the Secretary

---

[1] Katherine Gypson, "2023", "US Lawmakers Pass Sweeping \$886 Billion Defense Spending Bill", VOA, [Online: web], Accessed: 15 December 2023, URL: <https://www.voanews.com/a/us-lawmakers-pass-sweeping-886-billion-defense-spending-bill/7398213.html>

[2] Ibid

## JAPAN

of State emphasised on modifying command structures of US military in Japan especially to complement Tokyo's new Permanent Joint Headquarters (PJHQ). Comparatively there is a significant difference between NDAA from this year and the last year. AUKUS was only mentioned in the previous year's NDAA as a multilateral framework, akin to the Quad involving the United States, Japan, India, and Australia. The bill this year has commenced few measures especially for the US government in relation to the Indo-Pacific region. The Secretary of State would appoint a senior adviser to oversee all AUKUS-related initiatives. The bill also stated: "That individual may not hold any other position concurrently while serving as the senior adviser." [3]

According to the bill, a senior civilian official in the Pentagon could be designated as the person in charge of AUKUS activities. In addition, he/she must be assisted by a sufficiently sized staff and oversee a task force that meets on a regular basis. Regarding Japan, the bill emphasises that the secretary of defence provide a report on strengthening security cooperation with Tokyo by June 2024. The bill stated that the report should include:

"An analysis of the feasibility and advisability of modifying United States command structures in Japan," in part to "complement similar changes by the Self-Defense Forces of Japan." [4] This is mostly in reference to Japan's "new permanent joint command" which would focus on jointness of all the three SDF branches -- air, ground and maritime. This is supposed to be a part of Japan's "National Defense Strategy" (NSS) which came into being in December 2022. The mentioned the significance of creation PJHQ mostly to bring jointness in operations and unify the three services.

For Indian strategists the question arises whether AUKUS would have a positive or an adverse impact on India's strategic position in the Indo-Pacific region. They might collaborate to assist in thwarting fresh threats from India's northern neighbour. [5] The pact had the ability to discourage or deter China which implies that the agreement would benefit India and its allies in the region. According to David Brewster, National Security College, Australian National University, AUKUS encourages collaboration in other areas that might end up being equally significant and there exist a lot of opportunity in which India could get involved. There will be plenty of chances for India to be involved as AUKUS cooperation expands beyond nuclear propulsion technology to discuss cooperation in fields like artificial intelligence, quantum, and submarine technologies. The AUKUS agenda appears to be more focused on defence and security technologies than the Quad. Despite some people's reservations, it might be a useful approach for India to get access to those technology. [6] Regarding Japan, it is one of the closest partners of India. Both the countries share several common interests in the Indo-Pacific region. Any kind of jointness within in the three could be considered beneficial for India.

---

[3] Ken Moryasu, (2023), "U.S. defense bill strengthens military ties with AUKUS, Japan", [Online: web], Accessed: 15 December 2023, URL: <https://asia.nikkei.com/Politics/International-relations/Indo-Pacific/U.S.-defense-bill-strengthens-military-ties-with-AUKUS-Japan>

[4] Ibid

[5] David Brewster (2022), "AUKUS can be a good platform for cooperation with India", Lowy Institute, [Online: web], Accessed 13 December 2022, URL: <https://www.lowyinstitute.org/the-interpreter/aukus-can-be-good-platform-cooperation-india>

[6] Ibid

# Erdogan Expects Steps From US On F-16 Sale For Sweden NATO Accession

<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/12/6/erdogan-expects-steps-from-us-on-f-16-sale-for-sweden-nato-accession>

Opposition to sale in US Congress remains as Sweden awaits nod from Turkey's parliament before it can join alliance.

## COMMENTS

### Background

In May 2022, feeling vulnerable and haunted from past experiences,[1] Sweden and Finland abandoned their non-aligned status and initiated efforts to join the NATO alliance. Their membership application requires the endorsement by all 30 members. While the request of Finland was ratified, that of Sweden was kept on hold by Hungary and Turkey for material gains from members of NATO.[2]

Subsequently, Turkey gave a verbal acceptance when the US signalled the likely sale of F-16 fighter jets and kits to modernize its existing fleet to them in Jul 23[3] and followed it up by introducing a formal protocol on 23 Oct 23 to be ratified by the Grand National Assembly of Turkey.[4] However, even after six months, it is not clear when the US Congress will give clearance for the sale of the F-16s to Turkey.[5] The Turkish President in the interim has been flagging the need for Sweden to take action against the Kurdish armed groups and the fact that he expects the US to fulfil their duty of passing the F-16 issue in the Congress. Lack of required clarity from the US Congress has forced the Turkish Parliament's foreign affairs commission to delay a vote on Sweden's membership bid before it can be put to a full Parliament vote[6] and accord of acceptance of Sweden as a member of NATO.

### Turkey's interest in the F-16s

Turkey joined NATO in 1952. Since then, it is the second largest contributor to the NATO forces for personnel and equipment. It is one of the top five contributors to the missions and operations of NATO. It has had military relations with the US and allows two of their air bases to operate from their soil. The Base at Incirlik is reported to house 50 nuclear weapons and over 500 military personnel.[7]

---

[1] BBC, (2023, July 11), How Sweden and Finland went from neutral to NATO, BBC News, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-61397478>

[2] Hungary In The Spotlight After Turkey Presses On With Sweden's Bid To Join NATO, pp. 29-30, Geo-Strategic Scan 19-31 Oct 22, CENJOWS, [https://cenjows.in/pdf-view/?url=2023/11/Geo\\_Strategic\\_Scan\\_updated\\_2\\_CENJOWS.pdf&pID=21576](https://cenjows.in/pdf-view/?url=2023/11/Geo_Strategic_Scan_updated_2_CENJOWS.pdf&pID=21576)

[3] Press statement, (2023, Jul 10), Following the meeting between Türkiye, Sweden, and the NATO Secretary General, NATO, [https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/news\\_217147.htm](https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/news_217147.htm)

[4] Justin Spike, (2023, October 24), Hungary in the spotlight after Turkey presses on with Sweden's bid to join NATO, APNews, <https://apnews.com/article/hungary-sweden-nato-accession-trukey-orban-erdogan-245d9d480bbae93606a38e5ce2c833ed>

[5] CRC, (2023, September 05), Turkey (Türkiye): Possible U.S. F-16 Sale, Congressional Research Service, <https://crsreports.congress.gov/product/pdf/IN/IN12111>

[6] News Agency, (2023, December 06), Erdogan expects steps from US on F-16 sale for Sweden NATO accession, Aljazeera, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/12/6/erdogan-expects-steps-from-us-on-f-16-sale-for-sweden-nato-accession>

Turkey has had F-16s since 1987. Today, they have nearly 270 F-16C/D of block 30, 40 and 50. They are one of the five countries (others being Belgium, the Netherlands, Denmark and South Korea) that manufacture F-16s locally.[8] They have even exported F-16s to the Middle East countries and Egypt. In 2003, they became a level three partner for the manufacture of the F-35 and began producing critical components for the F-35.

In 2007 Turkey officially joined the production phase of the JSF program, and agreed to purchase a total of 116 F-35A. Of the first order of 40 F-35s, they received four between 2018 and 2019 after which the US Senate disallowed sale of F-35s to Turkey as they had procured the S-400 missile system from Russia after being denied the sale of the Patriot missile system by the US. As of 2023, the US has not refunded the payment received for purchasing the F-35s.[9] To recover their money, Turkey suggested the sale of 40 block-70 F-16 warplanes along with 80 modernization kits for the existing F-16s in their inventory.[10]

### Future of Turkish Air Force

For Turkey, Greece is a threat. Assuming that by 2027 when Greece gets all their F-16s upgraded to Block-72 standards, they would be far superior to the Block 30/40/50 jets of Turkey. In addition, Greece is likely to take delivery of 24 Dassault Rafales F3R fighters by 2025 and has expressed interest in purchasing F-35 Lightning II stealth fighter jets which will provide them an upper hand over the Turkish Air Force. Since block 70 and 80 modernization kits provide advanced electronically scanned array (AESA) radar with a new avionics architecture, structural upgrades to extend aircraft life by 50 per cent, new software, and advanced datalink, targeting pod, and weapons, these upgrades are considered the fastest way to modernise the existing air fleet of Turkey.

For Turkey, upgrading F-16s are not only a matter of convenience, they are imperative financially and strategically to address the requirement of their ageing air fleet. In the present geopolitical climate, Turkey could opt for Russian fighter jets like the Su-35 and the Su-57. However, these Russian warplanes would be expensive to integrate with the existing US sourced military hardware.[11] Similarly, for purchase of 40 fighter jets from Eurofighter, they have got the consent of UK and Spain while Germany is still to be convinced.[12] Assuming that the US Congressional approval is accorded, it will be awhile before the upgrades will be available owing to production backlogs of Lockheed Martin.

---

[7] TRT World, Will the US refund \$1.4B Turkey paid for F-35s?, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YEXgSUAnBzs>

[8] Turkey, (n.d), F16.net, [https://www.f-16.net/f-16\\_users\\_article21.html](https://www.f-16.net/f-16_users_article21.html)

[9] Zoe Strozewski, (2021, Sep 30), Turkey Demands U.S. Deliver Fighter Jets or Return \$1.4 Billion Payment for Them, Newsweek, <https://www.newsweek.com/turkey-demands-us-deliver-fighter-jets-return-14-billion-payment-them-1634300>

[10] Suzan Frazer, (2021, Sep 30), Turkey wants compensation for ouster from US-led jet program, Defence News, <https://www.defensenews.com/2021/09/30/turkey-wants-compensation-for-ouster-from-us-led-jet-program/>

[11] Ritu Sharma, (2023, October 18), F-16 Vipers: Why Is Turkey 'Desperate' For Fighting Falcons Despite Presence Of Sukhoi, Rafales & Eurofighters In Market?, The Eurasian Times, <https://www.eurasiantimes.com/f-16-vipers-why-is-turkey-desperate-for-fighting-falcons-despit/>

[12] Merie Jago, (2023, Nov 28), Turkey seeks to replace its obsolete fighter jets, LeMonde, [https://www.lemonde.fr/en/international/article/2023/11/28/turkey-seeks-to-replace-its-obsolete-fighter-jets\\_6296693\\_4.html](https://www.lemonde.fr/en/international/article/2023/11/28/turkey-seeks-to-replace-its-obsolete-fighter-jets_6296693_4.html)



# Nigeria, Philippines, Argentina Showing Interest in Procuring Tejas Jets: HAL chief

<https://m.economictimes.com/news/defence/nigeria-philippines-argentina-showing-interest-in-procuring-tejas-jets-hal-chief/articleshow/105808333.cms>

On how India will proceed with the supply of the Tejas jets to Argentina if the procurement fructifies as the aircraft has some components sourced from the United Kingdom, the Chairman and Managing Director of Hindustan Aeronautics Ltd (HAL) said a way would be found out in such a scenario. One of the components in the LCA ( Light Combat Aircraft ) is the Martin-Baker ejection seat, which is of British origin.

## COMMENTS



Source: Hindustan Times

Argentina ,Nigeria, Philippines, Egypt have evinced interest in Tejas, the Light Combat Aircraft (LCA) manufactured by Hindustan Aeronautics Limited (HAL), Ananthakrishnan told PTI on the sidelines of an event.[1] The Tejas aircraft has attracted significant attention in the face of strong competition from global contenders like China's JF-17 jet, South Korea's FA-50, Russia's MiG-35, and Yak-130. The former IAF member previously mentioned a convergence in the foreign policies of India and Argentina, particularly following Buenos Aires' entry into the BRICS grouping.[2]

Earlier this year, the Argentine Air Force dispatched a team of pilots and technical experts to India to assess and evaluate the Tejas fighter jets, including actively flying the aircraft for examination.

However , this deal with Argentina aligns with India's strategy to enhance defense exports, establishing itself as a prominent player in the global defense market and securing a notable presence in South America. Ensuring the global impact of Aatmanirbhar Bharat is vital for India. The TEJAS jet fighter is priced between US\$ 30-33 million, making it a reasonable option for Argentina, which is constrained on funds but keen on establishing an operational air force. Approximately 40-45 TEJAS fighters have been built for the Indian Air Force and Navy, with Argentina expressing interest in acquiring twelve jets.[3]

[1] Pti. (2023, December 7). Nigeria, Philippines, Argentina showing interest in procuring Tejas jets: HAL chief. The Economic Times.

<https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/defence/nigeria-philippines-argentina-showing-interest-in-procuring-tejas-jets-hal-chief/articleshow/105808333.cms?from=mdr>

[2] Why Argentina picked US F-16 jets over LCA Tejas, veteran IAF marshal explains. (2023, October 11). Sputnik India. <https://sputniknews.in/20231011/why-argentina-picked-us-f-16-jets-over-lca-tejas-veteran-iaf-marshall-explains--4726463.html>

[3] INDIA PREPARED TO REPLACE UK COMPONENTS FROM TEJAS JET FIGHTER, OF INTEREST FOR ARGENTINA. (2022, August 31). Indian Defence News. Retrieved December 15, 2023, from <https://www.indiandefensenews.in/2022/08/india-prepared-to-replace-uk-components.html#:~:text=The%20price%20range%20for%20the,Indian%20Air%20Force%20and%20Navy>

## LATIN AMERICA

Nonetheless, Argentina and the United Kingdom have an unresolved territorial dispute regarding the sovereignty of the Falkland Islands, an archipelago in the South Atlantic. Consequently, Argentina is restricted from purchasing weapons containing British components.

Ejector seats, crucial for fighter jets' safety, are supplied globally by the British manufacturer Martin Baker to over 90 air forces. The TEJAS fighter is equipped with a Martin-Baker ejection seat, renowned for pioneering the 'zero-zero' capability for safe extraction and landing at zero airspeed and altitude.

Although India is ready to tailor its indigenous LCA Tejas fighter jets to meet Argentina's specific needs, this customization comes at an additional cost. HAL is currently in talks with NPP Zvezda, a Russian ejection seat manufacturer.[4] Nevertheless instead of relying on foreign nations for Tejas components, India should strive to manufacture it entirely domestically, fostering the principles of Aatmanirbhar Bharat. India and Argentina share a commitment towards global governance reforms and have actively supported the decolonization process. New Delhi also stands by Argentina in its enduring dispute with the United Kingdom concerning sovereignty over the Malvinas Islands in the South Atlantic, presently under UK control.

The presence of India in Latin America is noteworthy, and both countries have committed to strengthening bilateral cooperation in the defense sector, building upon the 2019 MoU. Since, the Indian Air Force also aims to replace its Soviet-era Mig-21 fleet with Tejas by 2025, the manufacturing capacities will need to be upscaled.



Source: Twitter

[4] India Prepared to Replace UK Components From TEJAS Jet Fighter, of Interest for Argentina. (2022, August 31). Indian Defence news. Retrieved December 15, 2023, from <https://www.indiandefensenews.in/2022/08/india-prepared-to-replace-uk-components.html>

## Russia Ramps Up Arctic Route Ambitions

<https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2023/12/05/russia-ramps-up-arctic-route-ambitions-a83325>

Russia has been launching major investments and building up its military presence in the Arctic as it steps up its drive to develop a crucial northern maritime route linking Asia and Europe. In the country's latest move, Russia's nuclear agency Rosatom on Tuesday presented its two new RITM-200 reactors that will power the future Chukotka icebreaker ship.

## Norway Parliament Agrees To Open Arctic Ocean To Seabed Mining.

<https://www.firstpost.com/world/norway-parliament-agrees-to-open-arctic-ocean-to-seabed-mining-13469802.html>

As a significant oil and gas producer, Norway aims to explore the ocean floor for minerals crucial for renewable energy technologies, a controversial practice due to its potential impact on marine ecosystems.

## What Do US Sanctions on Russia's Arctic LNG 2 Project Mean for the World Energy Order?

<https://thewire.in/energy/what-do-us-sanctions-on-russias-arctic-lng-2-project-mean-for-the-world-energy-order>

The new bouts of sanctions the United States recently imposed on Russia apparently signal a strategic shift in the world energy order. The latest sanctions on Russia's Arctic liquefied natural gas (LNG) 2 project – imposed as a penalty for its war on Ukraine – have different ramifications. Insofar as a new geopolitical dynamic takes shape in the already volatile Arctic region, Washington appears determined to prevent Russia from gaining prominence in the global energy market.

### COMMENTS

The world's northern polar region, once considered an unclaimed area, has recently become a focus of attention due to technological advancements. Climate change, increased military activity, and discovery of rare minerals have made the region a point of geopolitical and geo-economic competition. This ongoing competition for power has transformed the entire landscape into a battleground for resources and territorial disputes. This has prompted the Arctic Council to examine whether their sea lanes and continental shelf will be a point of strategic competition or an area for cooperation that benefits all involved.

The members, as well as the observer nations of the Arctic Council, have started prioritising the region of national importance. The region is critical to both energy and defence sectors, as evidenced by Russia intensifying its efforts in the Arctic through enhanced military capabilities, such as deploying S-300 and S-400 missiles and radar installations and heavy investments in the Northern Sea Route (NSR) development project.[1] The envisioned maritime link connecting Asia to Europe seeks to access the emerging trade routes via NSR and explore the untapped natural resources through its Arctic-2 LNG

## ARCTIC

project.[2] The project focuses on extracting natural gas and LNG, with India and China emerging as their top consumers. The ongoing power tussle is quite prominent with the reconstruction of airfields and bases in Murmansk and Norway's exploration of its seabed for minerals and geothermal studies.[3] The Norwegian effort to harness the Arctic region's potential stems from its desire to reduce Europe's dependence on China for its mineral requirements.[4] The proposed plan targets the research to discover the potential of geothermal studies and advance the blue and ocean economy.

As an observer state of the council, India is a beneficiary of the evolving dynamics of the Arctic region and power politics. This strategic move was observed during the India- Nordic Baltic Conclave in November 2023, where future opportunities for cooperation with Norway were discussed in areas of rare earth mining, research and development projects on polar and climate studies.[5] Russia, stretching over 53 percent of the Arctic coastline, calls ties with India a "special, privileged strategic partnership", mainly because India solely accounted for 35 percent of cargo traffic on the Murmansk port.[6] India has demonstrated a growing interest in the Arctic region and is actively seeking Russia's commitment to complete an extended version of the North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC). The completion of this corridor would enable India to transport Arctic resources and solidify its position in the region. The INSTC is a vital alternative to China's Belt and Road Initiative for India. It allows the country to pursue its dual strategy of challenging and delegitimising China's efforts with greater efficacy.



Source: Twitter

[1] AFP, "Russia Ramps Up Arctic Route Ambitions", The Moscow Times, 05 December 2023. <https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2023/12/05/russias-extremist-ban-fuels-lgbt-flight-a83324>

[2] K.M. Seethi, "What Do US Sanctions on Russia's Arctic LNG 2 Project Mean for the World Energy Order?", The Wire, 19 November 2023. <https://thewire.in/energy/what-do-us-sanctions-on-russias-arctic-lng-2-project-mean-for-the-world-energy-order>

[3] TASS, "Five Russia's Arctic zone airports to be reconstructed by end of 2024", TASS, 12 December 2023. [https://tass.com/economy/1719297?utm\\_source=google.com&utm\\_medium=organic&utm\\_campaign=google.com&utm\\_referrer=google.com](https://tass.com/economy/1719297?utm_source=google.com&utm_medium=organic&utm_campaign=google.com&utm_referrer=google.com)

[4] Victoria Klesty and Nerijus Adomaitis, "Why does Norway want to mine the seabed?", Reuters, 14 September 2023. <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/why-does-norway-want-mine-seabed-2023-09-14/>

[5] Huma Siddiqui, "India's Collaborative Endeavours: Navigating Geothermal Energy, Arctic Exploration, and Global Partnerships", Financial Express, 22 November 2023. <https://www.financialexpress.com/business/defence-indias-collaborative-endeavours-navigating-geothermal-energy-arctic-exploration-and-global-partnerships-3314248/>

[6] Nima Khorrani, "India-Russia Cooperation in the Arctic and the Rising Prospect of Polarization in Arctic Governance", The Arctic Institute, 21 June 2022. <https://www.thearcticinstitute.org/india-russia-cooperation-India-Russia%20Cooperation%20in%20the%20Arctic%20and%20the%20Rising%20Prospect%20of%20Polarization%20in%20Arctic%20Governancearctic-rising-prospect-polarization-arctic-governance/>